BERNAL JOURNAL

1984 July/August

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United We Stand

BHC and BHCF Merge for Strength

By Michael Moore

In the most significant event in local community efforts in some time, the Bernal Heights Community Foundation and the Bernal Heights Council have announced plans to merge their organizations. Their hope is for one united community organization which can effectively respond to the needs of the community, and be a vehicle for Bernal residents to have a real impact on some of our pressing problems. The new organization is being structured so that community residents can decide for themselves what they want for their neighborhood.

The Bernal Heights Community Foundation was formed in 1978 as a nonprofit corporation to preserve and improve the neighborhood as an ethnically diverse working class area. Many community volunteers have worked hard over the years to make the Foundation successful. The Neighborhood Center at 515 Cortland became a reality, and now provides space for a senior lunch program, youth events, and a host of other activities. The Foundation has built four affordable houses and aided dozens of people in repairing their homes at low cost.

The Bernal Heights Council was established three years ago as a membership group for everyone on the hill. Its mission has been the empowerment of residents through a strong grassroots group that can take on pressing social problems and contribute to the well-being of all residents.

The merged group, however, will be greater than the sum of its parts. The experience and resources of the BHCF as a community development corporation plus the strength in numbers and organizing experience of the Council members can meld into the kind of group we need to preserve our neighborhood and make things a bit better, especially for those most in need of help.

The actual process of merging organizations is now in motion. The Steering Committee of the Council and the Foundation's Board of Directors have been working together to review bylaws and plan a door-to-door membership drive. The drive will explain the idea of a strong, united neighborhood organization: everyone will be invited to become members. A general membership meeting to begin the process of electing a Board of Directors that will be truly representative of the entire community and accountable to it will be scheduled shortly.

"Thanks to the efforts of a great many people over many decades Bernal Heights has a reputation for toughness, community spirit. A new, united organization will insure that we get what is rightfully ours: a fair share of public services, a say in the future of our neighborhood," says Judy Drummond, a member of the BHCF Board of Directors and a leader in the Council. Judy, a teacher at Paul Revere School, epitomizes the dedication and tenacity that characterize the best of Bernal Heights.

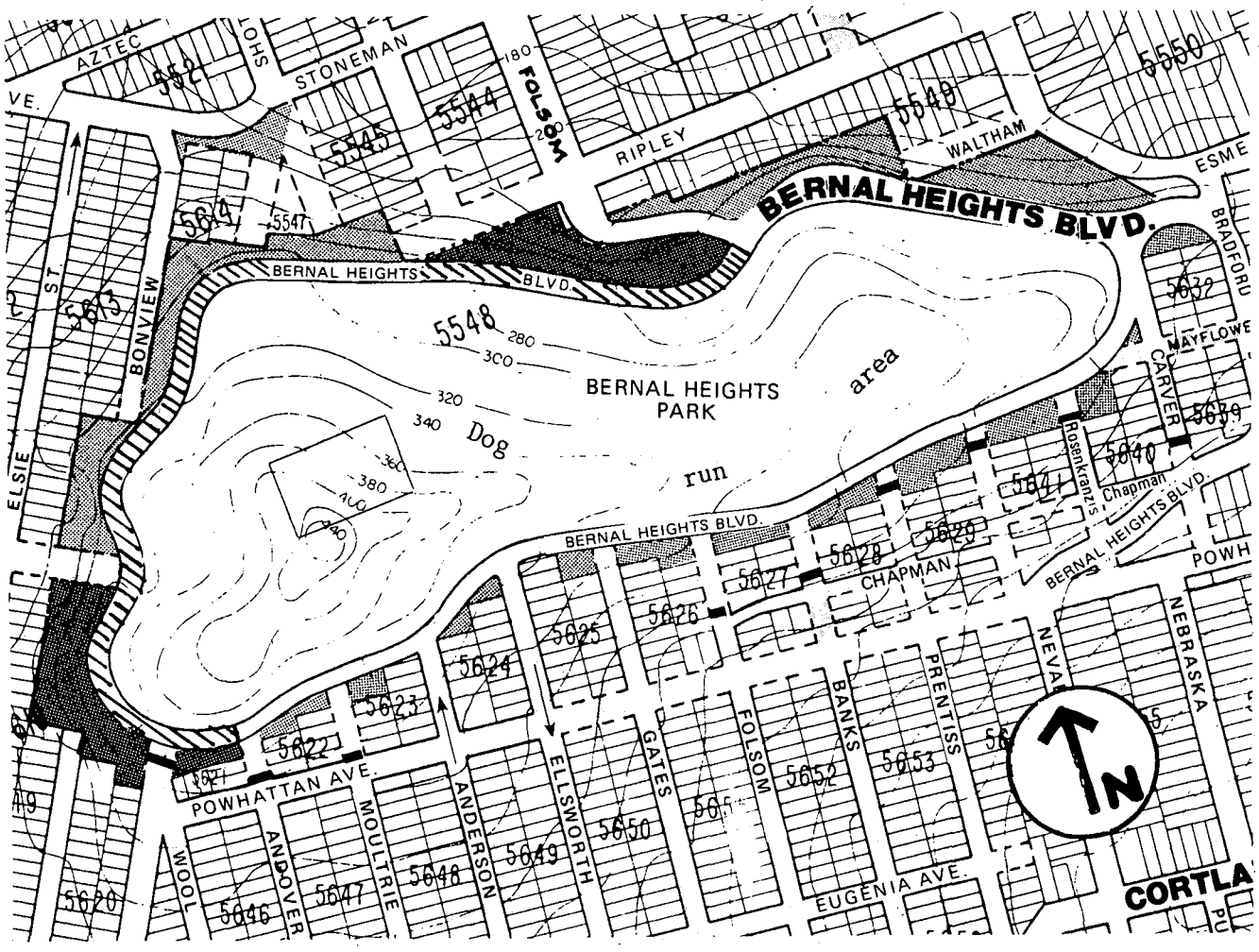
The BHCF and BHC are putting out a call to all interested parties to lend a hand with the membershipp drive. (This means you!) Even if you can spend only a little time, you can talk to a few of your neighbors and enroll them. Learn more by calling the BHCF office at 647-4255.

Barbara Kelley Retires — 38 Years at Paul Revere

on page 6

Photograph by DAVID BUTTERFIELD

Breakin' Out Summer '84 — A dance and breaking contest, sponsored by the Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center among others, will continue the preliminaries on August 11 and 25 at California Hall, 625 Polk St. Grand prizes are 40 scholarships from the S.F. Ballet plus a $1000 cash prize. The contestant above was a participant at earlier eliminations at the Bernal Gym.



Section of BH Blvd. to be closed

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Bernal Parklands Project Under Way

The first phase in a long anticipated community project to extend Bernal Park to include the lower slopes, especially the scenic west side, is ready for action. The goal of this project is to create and preserve for our community and the City as a whole a natural and unspoiled area for diverse enjoyment.

On June 8, the portion of the Bernal Plan pertaining to a trial closure of Bernal Heights Boulevard was heard before the Public Works Committee of the Board of Supervisors. After final approval by the full Board and the mayor, we will have 4 to 6 months to evaluate the effects of the closure. Many Bernal Hill residents have worked on this project and the entire community will be able to benefit from the additional protected open space.

Barriers to exclude vehicular traffic from the west side need to be designed in such a way as to permit emergency vehicles, bicyclists, runner s, strollers, skateboarders and the handicapped access to the area.

The Department of Public Works will be working with the community to insure the effectiveness and attractiveness of the gates which will be installed at the junction of Folsom and Bernal Heights Boulevard on the north and at Andover and Bernal Heights Boulevard on the south (see map). This section of the road has no residences or intersecting roads.

Parking bays for visitors and residents will be provided as well as appropriate signs, street lighting and trash containers. The configuration of a jogging trail, approved by the Department of Recreation and Parks and awaiting funding, is still to be determined. Community members interested in participating in this decision are encouraged to contact the open space committee through the Bernal Heights Community Center.

Note to dog owners: The entire top section bounded by Bernal Heights Boulevard will remain a run area for dogs--the only one in our neighborhood.

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BERNAL JOURNAL

The Bernal Journal is produced every two months by a group of volunteers, with the support of community business. Our circulation for this issue is 5000. Our mailing address is 515 Cortland Avenue, SF 94110.

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DEADLINES

For proper function of the newspaper, we must have material on time. Please submit articles by August 20 and ads by August 25 for next issue. If you plan to submit aricles, notices, or illustrations, please notify us in advance. Thank you.

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BERNAL HEIGHTS REVISITED . . .

By Abigail Sterling-Vasquez

"Bernal Heights isn't exactly the go-go market of real estate," says Supervisor Bill Maher, who has lived here for the past eight years. Yet on this San Francisco hill, where some of the wealthiest residents still live off of dirt roads, the way things are is just the way people want them to stay.

On the map Bernal Heights is laid out in standard grid fashion, like the rest of the city. In reality this neighborhood's streets are one of its most unique features. Walking up Peralta Street, for instance, the road gives way to a narrow path bordered by thickets of fennel. Past Montcalm Street it becomes a flight of stone stairs, interrupted by Rutledge Street, climbing on up toward Massasoit Street and a sunny April sky speckled with cumulus clouds like a primitive painting.

The sounds of the city fade into echoes. The air is thick with bird songs and dog barks. On Mullen Street an old blue Datsun won't start. The dull click of its ignition breaks the stillness. From up here the fog, squeezing its way through the Golden Gate Bridge into the Bay, looks like a thin tongue reaching for a downtown skyline etched by the afternoon sun.

Rising 400 feet above San Francisco's Mission district, bounded by Alemany Boulevard on the South, the Bayshore Freeway on the East, Army Street on the North and Mission Street on the West, Bernal Heights is easily recognized from across the city by Pacific Bell's microwave relay tower which sits on its bald summit like a crooked crown.

Originally developed in 1839 as part of a land grant belonging to Don Jose Cornelio Bernal, the area remained a grazing pasture for many decades, surrounded by the salt marshes of the San Francisco Bay. Since Bernal Heights wasn't connected to San Francisco's gas or electric lines, it was spared much of the damages caused by the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake and fire, and continued to provide fresh milk and produce to city markets well into the '60s.

Jeanne Hamer, writing from her home on Elsie Street in 1967, described the hill like this: "... There were trees, wild sweet peas, blackberry bushes. The farm was on the other side of the hill right up from Stillman and Manchester. They had cows, goats, ducks and a bull ... whenever anyone got sick enough to go to the hospital, the ambulance drivers had to carry the person over the dirt paths. It was country living just four blocks from Mission Street."

The Irish came to live on Bernal Heights first, followed by second-generation Italians and some Germans. During World War II many of the shipyard workers from near-by Hunters Point Naval Shipyard also migrated to Bernal Heights with their families, along with Latin American and Asian immigrants from the densely populated Mission District.

According to 1979 census figures, the tract of land on which the bulk of the hill stands has remained predominantly white. Latin Americans, mainly from Mexico, form the second largest group, followed by Asians, particularly Filipinos and Blacks. In 1979 there were also 59 Samoans, 42 Vietnamese, 27 American Indians, 2 Guanamanians and 2 Aleut Eskimos, to name but a few.

According to Maher, Laotians are now moving to the Hill in the latest wave of migration, along with the so-called new breed of "young urban professionals," most of whom are white. 1979 figures show residents were earning a median income of $22,300, as compared to $25,672 for

continued on next page

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ROBERTO HERNANDEZ, Director

from preceding page

San Francisco as a whole. Bernal Heights residents are also on average four years younger than the rest of the city's residents.

A walk through the neighborhood indicates that except for the predominantly Latin American northern foot of the hill, near Precita Park, there are no cultural ghettos on Bernal Heights. Cortland Avenue, Bernal Heights' little downtown, is a melting pot of culture. Across the street from St. Kevin's church is the Samoan O.K. Food Market, its storefront window stacked with 50-pound bags of rice. Further down the street is Cicero's Meat Market and the Cherokee Bar.

Along this eight-block long commercial strip everyone knows everyone and strangers stand out. However, business here is far from booming. A study of Cortland Avenue compiled in 1980 by San Francisco's Planning Commission indicates that "with increased mobility and competition from nearby shopping districts, Cortland Avenue has suffered a decline in business activity with accompanying physical deterioration and an increase in crime."

Although many of the storefronts are still boarded up, and many of the new shops that open seem to close again overnight, merchants here agree that the past four years have brought a few improvements. Following the Planning Commission study, the Department of City Planning allotted $30,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to paint Cortland Avenue's storefronts. Street lights, garbage cans and trees have also been put in this year.

According to Bob Andre, manager of the local branch of Bank of America, the neighborhood's reputation as a high crime, poorly frequented area is very damaging for new businesses. Loans, moreover, are out of the reach of most Cortland Avenue merchants, 86% of whom rent their storefronts. The area is considered high risk by many private lenders, and month-to-month leases prevent the merchants from being able to apply for federally funded Small Business Administration loans.

Local improvement is therefore mainly homespun. Barbara Clements, owner of the newly opened "Bernal Blossoms" flower shop, decorated her place completely on her own, and next door, at the Wild Side West Bar, Pat Ramseyer is clearing the back yard to start a outdoor patio extension. She rescued the jasmine bushes she is planting from a nearby dumpster.

Merchants here agree that the neighborhood's reputation as a high crime are is not entirely deserved. According to police statistics in 1983 the western slope of the hill, in the area where Cortland Avenue and Mission Street meet, had the highest crime rate in the Ingleside district, while crime figures on the eastern slope of Bernal Heights were some of the lowest in the city. For instance, there were only two assaults on the eastern side of the hill throughout 1983. On the Mission side there were 38.

Captain Frank Jordan of the Ingleside police station attributes the western slope's high crime figures to a "spillover" of crime from the Mission district. The eastern side of the hill is, as he describes it, "off the beaten path." Jordan believes that project SAFE (Safety Awareness for Everyone) might be responsible for at least partially stemming the spillover of crime from Mission Street.

Although the overall crime rate has declined both in Bernal Heights and citywide during the past five years, there has recently been an increase in burglaries in the neighborhood which Jordan ascribes to a concurrent rise in real estate values on the hill. The average price of a house in 1979 was $84,300. According to Abbe Stevenson, a Cortland Avenue real estate agent, homes rarely sell for below $100,000, and there is a big discrepancy between the cost of houses at the very top of the hill, many of which are now in the $180,000

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David Butterfield

Barbara Kelley at Work

by Randy Clark

Even though the furniture was built for people half her size Barbara Kelley is comfortable. This room, filled with miniature tables and chairs, headphones, books, and colorful pictures, is her domain. She has taught in rooms like this for 38 years.

World War II was not yet over when she walked into Paul Revere School to meet her first class of fourth graders. It was 1946. In the years since then, Kelley has taught scores upon scores of children the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

She remembers those days as if they were yesterday. How she got to school an hour early that first day to prepare for class and found no supplies in the classroom.

"It was scary for me because I thought there'd be paper and pencils or crayons or something," Kelley recalled. "When I found that out I flew around getting *pencils and paper*."

Looking at her you could believe that she really did fly around the school that day. There is a sense of boundless energy around her. An energy that nearly 40 years of teaching has not drained. There is a spark of love in her eyes when she speaks of her teaching career.

"There are very wonderful teachers at Paul Revere. We've always had that kind," she said.

It took a few years for Kelley to feel comfortable in the classroom. In the beginning, she said, she learned as much as her students.

Back then things were more strict and formal. Kelley remembered the first principal she taught under: a stern woman, stately with gray hair, who would drop in on her class unexpectedly.

"She would open the door very quietly," Kelley said. "Usually the back seat was empty. She'd slide into that little desk and sit there with paper and pencil and write down all the things I guess I did wrong."

Kelley said she owes a lot to that principal. "She taught me a lot.

"When I think of some of the things I taught I think 'My God! How could I have done that?'"

School district supervisors also observed classes in those days. Teachers had to prepare special lessons for those visits. The supervisors would recommend in-service courses for those who did not present their lessons well.

"I always had to take in-service courses in music because I can't sing," Kelley said with some frustration. "I'd say 'Oh, she's coming to hear me. I know she's going to suggest I take an in-service in music.' I took more in-services in music than any other teacher in the district, I think."

Kelley remembered the "rowdy bunch" of boys she first taught. "Of course, the new teacher always gets the worst kids."

They were not that hard on her, though. In fact, her eyes lit up as she thought of them. She fondly recalled how two students from her first class would come to her house on Saturdays to wash her shiny new maroon Chevrolet.

She remembers many of her former students. "I always ask about them." She has heard that some have gone on to become scientists, doctors, and real estate salesmen. Some are now police officers, some have gone to prison. Others have gone on to work for the school district. Some have sent their children to Paul Revere and Barbara Kelley has taught them, too.

She has taught the intermediate grades (4th, 5th, and 6th) as well as the third grade, which she said, was a harrowing experience at first.

"I thought 'Oh it won't be a nightmare. It's just the same as intermediate.' But it wasn't. I'd come home crying to my husband 'I don't like this! I can't do it!'"

In 1972 Kelley became the program resource teacher for federally funded programs at Paul Revere. Her job was to coordinate all programs funded by federal and state money. "We had lots of them," she said.

That job was too much paperwork and not enough children for her, though. In 1981 Kelley found her way back into the classroom, teaching reading in the Fluency in Reading program. She taught reading until her retirement in June.

Her plans for the future include a consultancy at the Environmental Sciences Center at Fort Funston where she will be working with children. She also plans to travel with her husband, who recently retired from his teaching assignment at Lincoln High School. And, Kelley said, she might take a part time job. She said she is considering working to become a private investigator.

As to her advice to future teachers: "Don't become a teacher," she joked. "The pay is horrible." Then, in earnest:

"You have to like children and you have to be willing to work hard because it is a hard job. Very hard....There's a lot of paperwork and it's going to be a lot harder for teachers."

"I like the people I worked with. I like the administration," Kelley said. "There's everything offered to these children. Every program imaginable. There's everything offered to these children. Every program imaginable. They're very lucky because the teachers are so dedicated. They're so caring with the children."

Kelley spoke with some agitation about her retirement dinner. No one would let her take part in the planning. "It's hard for me because I'm always involved with everything," she said. She listed duties such as cleaning the lunchroom, making coffee for the staff, handling school funds, coordinating the "traffic boys," and yes, arranging others' retirement dinners.

"Everybody says 'Why do you want to retire?' She shakes her head "I don't know. I just want to do something else."

But even as she thinks of all the things she will have the time and energy to do, she remembers the old corner store near the school where the teachers used to buy hot dogs on a hard roll for lunch.

"We just couldn't wait for lunchtime to get that sandwich." And she smiles at one of the many happy memories she has of her 38 years at Paul Revere School.

from page 5

range, and those farther down the slopes. Real estate values on the northern and western sides of the hill are also comparatively high because of the panoramic downtown views many homes there offer, while eastern and southern slope homes, whose windows face the Bayshore Freeway, are least expensive.

According to the most recent IRS figures, however, the median San Francisco income has risen approximately $10,000 since 1979. Although wealthier residents are to a certain extent replacing older ones on Bernal Heights, this doesn't seem to be happening any more here than elsewhere in the city.

Probably the best explanation for this is that the steep topography, the narrow, sometimes unpaved streets zoned for single family dwellings only, the smaller than average lots (25 feet by 70 feet, as compared to 25 feet by 100 feet in other parts of the city) and lack of city services have over time deterred development here.

This neighborhood contains one quarter of San Francisco's available building lots, with land values averaging $20,000, which is well below city average. Building permits, moreover, increased 74 percent in San Francisco during 1983 alone, and housing starts leaped 11.2 percent last February to their highest level since 1978. With its panoramic views, good weather and convenient location close to downtown San Francisco, the hill is becoming once again, as it was during the late '60s and '70s, an attractive alternative for small scale developers.

Keeping speculators away from the hill is an issue that residents here have always rallied around, earning for themselves a reputation for hard-headedness at City Hall. The story of the North West Bernal Block Club, or Elsie Street Group, as it later came to be called, is a case in point. Formed in 1964 by residents on the northwest slope, in the area of Bernal Heights bounded by Coso, Elsie, Virginia and Mission Streets, one of the group's first achievements was to make the city keep the top of the hill as an open area by tranferring it from the Department of Public Works to the Recreation and Parks Department.

The Elsie Street Group is probably best knwon for its "Elsie Street Plan," a 1978 survey of the 100 block of Elsie Street. The project involved the active participation of over 200 neighborhood residents working in conjunction with architects and planners, and was the culmination of a year's struggle to stop developers from the Homestead Development Group from being granted permits to build on ten open lots on the downhill side of the street.

The "Elsie Street Plan" was mandated by the San Francisco Planning Commission, which also agreed to consider the plan's guidelines before granting any further permit applications for the block. Although the Elsie Street Group was unable to prevent three of the lots from being built upon, the plan itself was a major victory for residents in that it set the standard for all future development on the block and on the rest of the hill as well.

Buildings were required to conform architecturally with existing structures, and development was also made conditional to city upgrading of adjacent streets and sewers. Since this would involve spending city dollars, and city dollars haven't been forthcoming, the Homestead Development Group is still at an impasse on Elsie Street. As Margaret Randolph, a veteran activist who lives on Elsie Street, says, "They are just laying low until we are all dead and gone, and then they'll build."

Most recently, a eucalyptus grove which can be prominently seen on the northern side of the hill has become the latest battlefront in Bernal Heights residents' war against developers. Tensions this time are high because the architect, Barry Hansen, is himself a resident. The fact that he is not, as he describes it, "a bigshot coming in from Hong Kong to build highrises," riles the neighbors even more. Perhaps this is because his renovated home at the foot of the grove is a constant reminder.

It all began when Hansen found that he was living on one of the hill's "paper" streets, which exist only on maps, and that half the land under his home belonged to the city. Hansen sued the family who had sold him the house and received additional land near the house, on which he planned, with three partners, to build 18 condominiums.

Jan Botza, a Bonview resident who lives directly across the street from the proposed site, says there was a consensus among neighbors that the condominium should not be built. Enlisting the help of the Bernal Heights Council, they formed the Bonview Block Club, held numerous meetings, distributed flyers and attended Planning Commission hearings in the true Bernal Heights spirit, arguing that the proposed project would be an eyesore, cause congestion on the street and be unaffordable to the average neighborhood resident. According to Hansen, units would range from $140,000 to $200,000.

In October of 1983 the Planning Commission finally approved a reduced version of the project. Before any building can start, however, Hansen will need to acquire from the city an additional section of land. This will require approval by San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, which could mean another long wait. According to Supervisor Maher, the Board is presently thinking of transferring a section of Bernal Boulevard immediately above the grove from DPW to the Recreation and Parks Department. This land transfer would probably also include the eucalyptus grove. If this is the case Hansen's condominium seems likely never to materialize.

"It's been quite a struggle," says Hansen. "I think San Francisco is a difficult place to live in, but Bernal Heights is definitely a more aggravated situation." Frank McIntosh, principal agent for San Francisco's Department of Real Estate, says that developers on Bernal Heights always get "completely frustrated by the stubbornness of the Hill people," as he calls Bernal Heights residents. "My understanding," says McIntosh, "is that much of this vacant land (on Bernal Heights) is going to the Recreation and Parks Department, and that's where it belongs."

All city neighborhoods change, as the City's inhabitants migrate through them. Bernal Heights just seems to have done so a little slower than the rest. For that, most of its residents are grateful.

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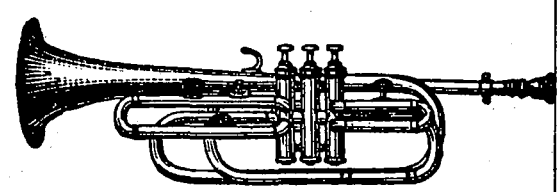

Tom Fewlass
168 MOULTRIE ST. / SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94110

MICHAEL NOLAN
MICHAEL NOLAN
COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS
141 10TH STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103
(415) 861-5126
100

3% Housing Rehab Loans Available

The Bernal Heights Community Foundation continues to have available 3% housing Rehabilitation Loans! The program offers qualified low-income single family homeowners as much as $20,000 dollars to correct serious Housing and Health and Safety code violations.

The money for this housing rehab loan program is part of a city wide program established by the Mayor's office. This program was first begun in 1981 in the Bernal Heights community. The program focuses on community residents who are elderly, disabled, or fall within low and moderate income levels. Residents who have lived in Bernal Heights for one year or longer who are owner occupants may be qualified.

Typically, the loan money may be used for home improvements relating to life threatening hazards and health and safety-related code work such as plumbing, electrical, foundations, etc..

Generally, the loans for 1 or 2 unit owners may be paid in small monthly payments over a ten year period, or for those who are qualified -- such as elderly and handicapped individuals. Loan payments may be deferred until the property is sold or transferred.

People interested in receiving more information are invited to call the Bernal Heights Community Foundation. Please ask for Gloria Ronas, or Michael Reed Monday thru Friday, 9am-5pm, or drop by the office located at 399 Cortland Avenue.

BART PROJECT

The next "Ident-A-Kid" children's fingerprinting program is scheduled August 25 at Glen Park BART station, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. The purpose is to provide parents with a record of their child's fingerprints for identification. Children should be at least one year old to participate.

There is no fee and the fingerprint record becomes the property of the parents. No fingerprint records will be maintained by the BART police or any other law enforcement agency. For more information, call the BART Police Department Crime Prevention Unit at 464-7048, 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. weekdays.

Bernal Heights Law Collective

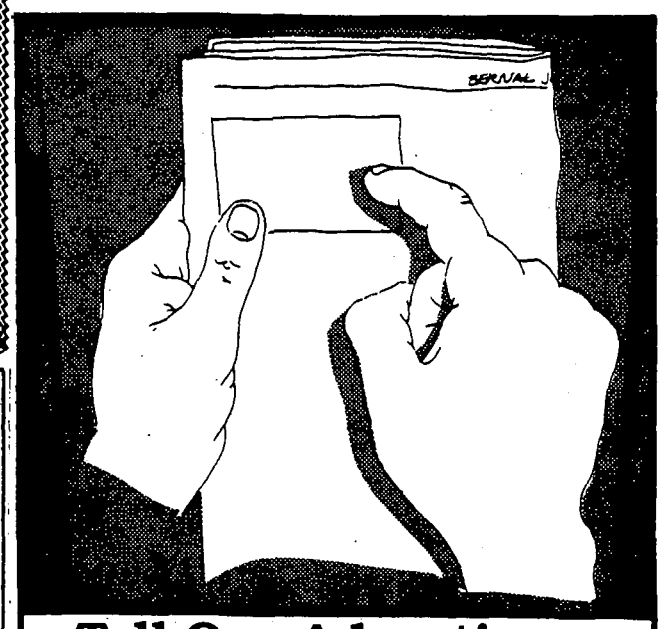
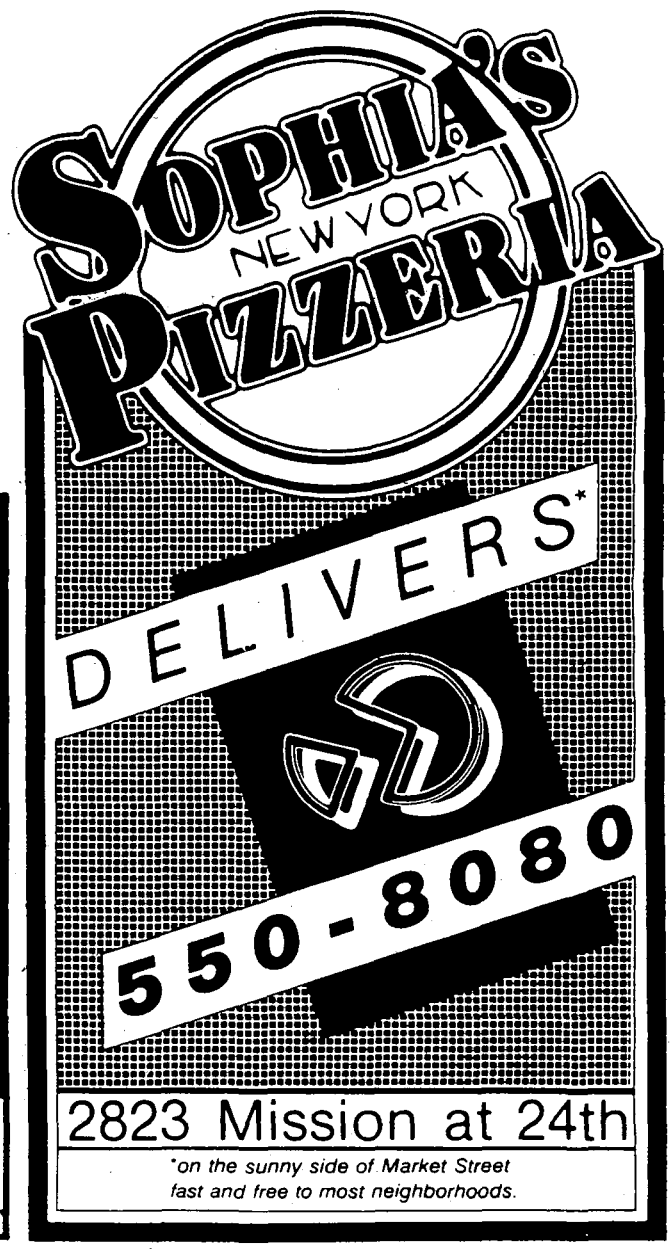
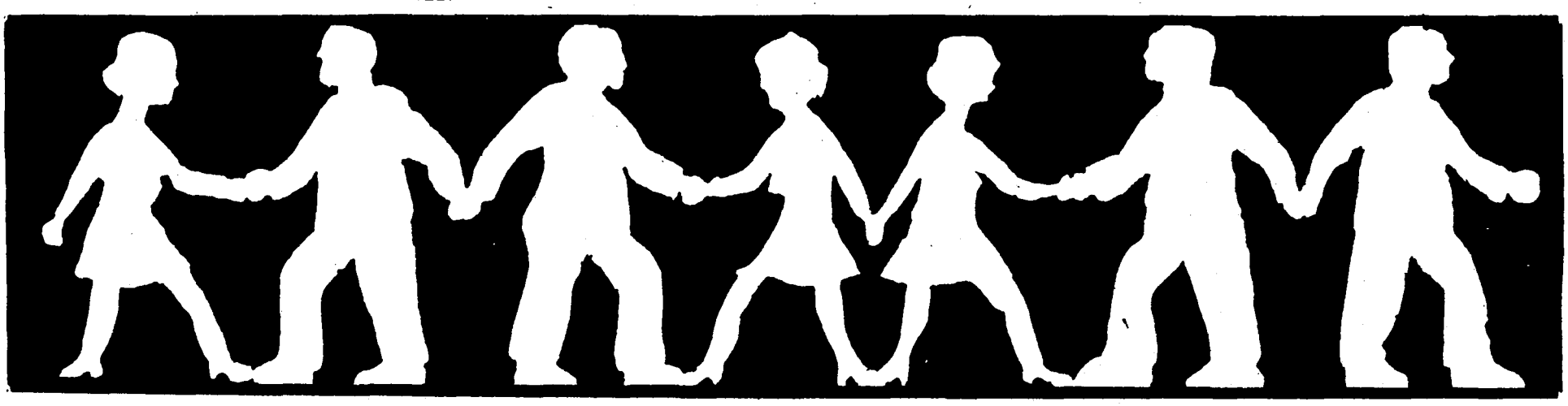
General Legal Practice including:
- Divorce and Family Law
- Criminal Defense
- Personal Injury
- Wills and Probate
- Social Security Disability
- Bankruptcy
- Immigration
- Eviction Defense

Free ½ hour consultation

707 Cortland Ave. (415) 826-6900

Pick up the phone

The Mayor's Summer Youth Program wants to put 1,500 young people to work this summer. If you are an employer who can use summer vacation help or wants to help a teen-ager, make one easy call to 861-JOBS. All the work of screening and testing employees will be done for you. Persons ages 16-21 who need employment, call 861-JOBS. They'll try to match you with someone who can put you to work.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